

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY**

### **SAUTA CAVE (BLOWING WIND CAVE) HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

TVA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) propose to eradicate invasive vegetation at and near the entrance to the Sauta Cave (Blowing Wind Cave) on North Sauty Creek in Jackson County, Alabama. The cave entrance is becoming over grown with English Ivy creating a curtain which is beginning to impact the entrance and exit flights of the bats. Also present at the site are other woody invasive plant species, including Nepalese browntop, Japanese honeysuckle, and privet, which are also encroaching on the habitat near the cave entrance. The primary objective of this collaborative effort is to protect and enhance the habitat for the Indiana and gray bats that utilize the cave. The project would also benefit the habitat of two sensitive plant species observed at the project location: the Price's potato bean (a federally-listed plant species) and the Cumberland rosinweed (a state-listed plant species).

TVA and FWS propose to eradicate English Ivy and other invasive plants at and around the opening of the Sauta Cave (Blowing Wind Cave). Less than one acre would be treated. English Ivy present at the cave opening would be treated with a combination of two methods:

- Where the ivy is climbing in trees, with hammer and plastic wedge, pull the larger (pencil size to garden hose size) vines away from the trunks of the trees at a convenient working height, cut the vines with loppers and treat the lower cut surface with an approved Triclopyr product using a paint brush or similar hand method, taking care not to impact desirable vegetation or spill the herbicide.
- Where the ivy is on the ground and/or rock faces, and where it can be done safely, reduce growth layers as needed and injure the leaves of the ivy with a string trimmer, and thoroughly wet all leaves and cut vines with an approved Glyphosate product mixed with an approved surfactant.

TVA would also apply herbicides to the other woody invasive plant species in the project area. TVA and FWS would determine the optimum timing for application of the herbicide. TVA would repeat the proposed eradication actions at the project location annually or as needed. In addition, TVA would conduct surveys of the forest in the vicinity of the cave to obtain bat activity data.

This project is part of an ongoing partnership to improve the habitat for certain threatened and endangered species of plants and animals in the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge complex in Northern Alabama. The project is in concert with the objectives of TVA's Natural Resource Plan in developing and implementing a variety of proactive methodologies in order to enhance and protect sensitive resources, habitats, and wildlife species. The project is also consistent with the FWS's Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Complex (August 2007) which identifies the wildlife and habitat management objectives for the Sauta Cave (Blowing Wind Cave) area.

The proposal is the subject of an EA prepared by TVA. In the EA, TVA addressed potential impacts of the proposed project as well as the alternative of not implementing the action (i.e., taking no action). In the EA, TVA identified relevant environmental issues and reviewed the

potential impacts of implementing the project to the following resources: endangered, threatened, or special status plant, aquatic, or wildlife species; to archaeological and historic resources; to water quality; and to special management areas. In its review, TVA identified no adverse or potentially significant impacts that would result from the proposal. The EA addresses the beneficial impacts of the habitat enhancement actions. The EA is specifically incorporated herein by reference.

### Conditions of Approval

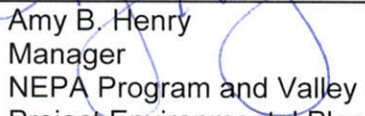
During the review, TVA and FWS identified procedures and practices to avoid or minimize impacts. In addition, the following project-specific measures would be taken:

- Before work occurs, a TVA and/or FWS botanist would survey the work area for additional federal and state-listed species and would ensure that Price's potato-bean, Cumberland rosinweed, and any other listed plant species located in the project area are flagged in the field.
- Select spray of herbicide would not occur within 1.5 meter of Price's potato-bean, Cumberland rosinweed, or other listed plants.
- Within a 1.5 meter radius of listed plants and near surface water (a stream) near the cave entrance, herbicide would be applied to foliage or to cut stems of undesirable vegetation using a brush or other method of direct application.

In addition, before implementing the project, the FWS would approve the proposal following its Pesticide Use Proposal review process. TVA would obtain a special use permit from the FWS prior to conducting the work as well.

### Conclusion and Findings

Based on the findings listed above and the analyses in the EA, we conclude that the habitat improvement activities at and near the entrance to the Sauta Cave (Blowing Wind Cave) is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the environment. Accordingly, an environmental impact statement is not required.

  
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Date Signed